

Castlemaine Naturalist

Pterostylis
sp. agg.
parviflora



June 1999

#256 Vol. 23.5

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey, 22/5/99

On a cold, grey Saturday morning six dedicated members gathered at 8.30am in preparation for the search of the local habitat for the elusive and endangered Swift Parrots and the even more elusive and endangered Regent Honeyeaters.

We headed off in three vehicles and covered the Newstead area in Pound Lane and Mia Mia Road, the Smiths Reef area near Maldon, and the rest of the Maldon State Forest and Muckleford area.

Conditions were very poor for observing, with leaden skies and a cold wind blowing, with steady rain coming late in the morning and early afternoon.

We met at the Red, White and Blue Mine for lunch. While we were awaiting the last vehicle to arrive we were bemoaning the fact that, though we had good sightings of other species, our target species had eluded us completely, when, with typical alarm calls, a flock of eight Swift Parrots flew noisily over us, heading in a north-easterly direction. Success!! Its just a matter of being in the right place at the right time!!

We all went for a stroll through the bush after lunch and then called it a day, with each vehicle taking a different track out of the forest in the hope of another sighting. (Unsuccessful).

The Bird List for the day was -

White-plumed,
Yellow-tufted,
White-eared and
Fuscous Honeyeaters
Red Wattlebird

Noisy Miner
Jacky Winter
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Scarlet Robin

Yellow Robin	Galah
Red-browed Firetail	Eastern Rosella
Spotted Pardalote	Crimson Rosella
Weebill	Swift Parrot
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Red-rumped Parrot
Brown Thornbill	Coot
Golden Whistler	Black Swan
Grey Shrike-thrush	Australasian Grebe
Crested Bell-bird (h)	Little Pied Cormorant
Blue Wren	Wood Duck
Welcome Swallow	White-faced Heron
White-browed Babbler	Brown Goshawk
Brown Tree-creeper	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Grey Currawong
White-winged Chough	Australian Magpie
Crested Pigeon	Australian Raven
Long-billed Corella	Little Raven

Maureen Dredge

The Misadventures of a Barn Owl

In July last year (1998) whilst pursuing my favourite subject, the study of the seeming relationship between the Barn Owl and the Min Min light I travelled to Hillston in western NSW. The dirt road to the station I wanted to visit was rendered impassable by continual rain, and I was forced to remain in the township for several days. Through a contact I met a lady whose first name only - Sue - I can remember. Sue knew about Min Mins and provided me with some useful information. She knew the Barn Owl, too. This story she told me I found most interesting.

One day, a little before the time I was there, her grandson brought home a 'blind' Barn Owl that he found in the gutter in the main street. The bird's eyelids were completely closed and extremely swollen. Sue bathed the eyes and gently parted the lids. Inside the lids she found embedded numerous bee stings. These she carefully removed and over the next few days the swellings subsided. The owl began to eat and after about a week the patient's sight seemed to have returned to normal. The bird was released and flew away, able to see exactly where it was going.

Sue speculated, perhaps correctly, that the owl had got itself into a tree hollow in which there happened to be a bee hive or was in the hollow when the swarm alighted at the entrance and the owl had to run the gauntlet in order to get out.

Fred Silcock

Calder Highway Upgrade – Faraday to Ravenswood

The long process to find a solution for the proposed upgrade of the Faraday to Ravenswood section is continuing. To date, seven reports to Vic Roads by the various consultants have been received. It is clear from these reports that the route known as FR4 is seen as favourable by a number of consultants.

Alignment FR4 crosses the ridge north of Specimen Gully road, cuts across Blackjack Road and rears some twelve metres above the Midland Highway (as well as the railway line) at Station Street Harcourt. It also traverses several areas of exceptional bushland which proliferate with wildflowers during the spring.

Many thousands of trees would have to be removed on the FR4 option. Yet, as Ern Perkins points out in his response to the Flora and Fauna Report, "Native vegetation on farmland is mostly depleted". Moreover, this alignment is home to many colonies of the Brush-tailed Phascogale.

It would be appropriate for you to express your concern now, then again when submissions are called for at a later date.

Letters can be addressed to –

Vic Roads (Calder Project)
PO Box 282
Kyneton, Vic. 3444

and telephone calls to 5422 6515.

Jacqui and John Turnbull

Footnote – John and Jacqui have sent a map with the article, and it shows that the FR4 would cut through the, admittedly not well publicised, patch of low vegetation which used to (I haven't checked it for several years) contain such rarities as the Swamp Diuris *Diuris palustris*, Broad-lip Diuris *D. x palachila* and possibly Short-tailed Diuris *D. brevissima* though this species may have been a variation of *D. x palachila*. Relatively undisturbed because it was not readily accessible, the Club visited the site a number of years ago and I remember seeing the Broad-tip Diuris, the conservation status of which is considered to be rare, on that afternoon. Perhaps it is time to make another visit – if it's not too late already.

Ed.

NEW MEMBERS Welcome to the Club Gill King, Robyn and Bill van Smeerdijk, David Whillas and Annie Pyers.

The Big Trip

On a clear Autumnal Friday afternoon I arrived home from work to be greeted by Maureen with the statement, "Guess what? We have a clear calendar this weekend." So what other incentive did we need to hurriedly pack the caravan and head off to our weekend destination?

We left Castlemaine at 5.30pm and arrived at our chosen destination at 5.45pm. (Yes. It's only a 15 minute trip to the Quince Tree in the Muckleford Forest!) We set up camp in lovely little clearing and thoroughly enjoyed a weekend of relaxing and birding in perfect weather conditions; clear and sunny with daytime temperatures in the low 20s, but down to 0° in the frosty mornings.

We recorded 40 species which was very pleasing as they were all "bushies" from the camp area with no raptors or water birds. Generally bird numbers were down, especially the honeyeaters, with only the Yellow-tufted in any quantity. Conditions were very dry with very little blossom. The highlight of the trip was a Crested Bellbird foraging around the campsite only 25 metres away from us.

The bird list for the camp was-

Magpie	Common Bronzewing
Grey Currawong	Yellow-tufted,
Crested Shrike-tit	White-plumed,
Galah	Black-chinned and
Crested Bellbird	Brown Headed Honeyeaters
Brown Treecreeper	Australian Raven
Willie Wagtail	Spotted Pardalote
Blue Wren	Striated Pardalote
White-bellied (Little) Cuckoo-shrike	Grey Fantail
Eastern Rosella	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	Hooded Robin ♂ and ♀
Kookaburra	Flame Robin ♂ and ♀
Varied Sitella	White-browed Babbler
Noisy Miner	Masked Lapwing
Welcome Swallow	Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher	Rufous Whistler ♂
White-winged Chough	Golden Whistler ♂
Jacky Winter	Red Wattlebird
Weebill	Dusky Woodswallow
Long-billed Corella	Red-rumped Parrot
and probable Owlet Nightjar.	Brown Thornbill

Also seen in the area the weekend before were spotted Quail-thrush, Musk Lorikeet, and Fuscous Honeyeater.

Maureen and Ken Dredge

The Festival Walk

Quite a number of Field Nats were present at the walk around the tracks in Muckleford Forest for the Festival Walk, making the crowd who attended around 70. The walk, which was run by the Field Naturalist Club and the Mount Alexander Shire Walks Committee, took us along several tracks, with a detour to the Dunnes reef mine site, and through several different habitats. We stopped for a cuppa at the Red White and Blue mine, and then turned back down Bells track to our starting point near the large private dam. On the way Ern Perkins explained the points on the leaflet that was handed out at the beginning of the walk. We managed to find a few birds like Sitellas, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, White-throated and Brown Treecreepers and Yellow Robins despite the number of people, including children, walking, and we found three different species of orchid - Midge orchid, Red-tip Greenhood and Parsons Bands. The weather was very pleasant, but the dry season meant that mosses and lichens were very crisp, and many shrubs were dead or stressed. What was much more disturbing were the trees marked with a blue cross for removal, some of them nice sized trees, including Red Ironbarks.

Despite the dry season, the blue crosses and the lack of obvious flowers everyone seemed to enjoy the walk and the chance to meet and chat with people with like interests.

A big thankyou on behalf of the CFNC committee to all who helped out, and especially to Ern Perkins for all the effort he put into making the day a success.

Rita Mills

A Chimneycreeper?

I have an old cottage with three tall brick chimneys. There is a Treecreeper which likes to climb the chimneys to look for spiders. I have even watched him climb up under the eaves, which are 45°, upside down. I think he sometimes roosts in the space between the chimney and the wall.

The other day, 23 Feb, he got a bit lost and came through the open door into the kitchen - well there's plenty of spiders in there, too. He was flying from one window to another but did not get back through the door. I caught him in my hand and he became quite quiet, but when I carried him out and let him go he flew off very fast with a cheery call.

I think he was a White-throated Treecreeper, but his front was more light sandy-grey. On top of his head was a lacework of light and dark greys. The rest of him was inside my hand, but when flying at the window he seemed to have pale green or pale yellow feathers in his

wing.

Frank Carpenter.

(Unfortunately this article went missing, but now its found again I thought that Frank's experiences were too interesting not to publish - even if a little late.Ed.)

Observations

* Wedgetailed Eagles - Three seen by Stan Bruton at Little Hampton, three at Barkers Creek by John Turnbull, a pair at Mount Franklin by Rita Mills and one over Harcourt by Brenda Envall. Margaret Hunter wonders if the ones seen at Barkers Creek and Harcourt might even belong to the pair and offspring that are seen regularly near their place on Mount Alexander, which is not very far across country. Margaret also reported that the Mount Alexander eagles were being pestered by a mixed flock of Cockatoos and Long-billed Corellas earlier in the month.

* John Turnbull was delighted to announce that he had at last seen a live Tuan (Brush-tailed Phascogale). It was on his property at Barkers Creek.

* "Mar. 11 - Two Crested Shrike-tits were cleaning up the bugs on the apple tree. One was a juvenile, but his begging got him nothing. Mar. 15. Same apple tree. A party of Orange-winged Sitellas flew in. I had two quite close (2 metres) and was able to identify them by their stumpy tails with a checkerboard pattern underneath. Although their red wings were visible when flying when their wings were folded no red was to be seen. Before flying in they were making a great noise in a neighbours' gum tree. There were ten or so altogether." Frank Carpenter.

* Also from Frank - "On two Occasions, Feb 6 and 24, a Dingy Swallowtail butterfly *Papilo anactus* was in the garden. It's not dingy at all, better to call it the Dainty Swallowtail - an all Australian Butterfly."

* Crested, Hoary-headed and Little Australasian Grebes, as well as Hardheads and Southern Shovellers were seen at Harcourt Reservoir by Chris Morris.

* George Evans reported seeing a juvenile Black Swan on Lake Johanna in the Botanical Gardens.

* One Brown Currawong seen in Anne van Gemert's fowl pen! (not sure whether 'brown' should be spelt with a capital or not in this case! Ed.)

* First Flame Robins, ♂ and ♀, seen at Leanganook gate, McKitteriks Rd. on Mt Alexander on May 9. Marg Hunter.

* Ken Dredge reported a small flock of Silver Gulls on the Camp Reserve on May 5, and a single bird was seen in the Castlemaine Bacon car park.

* In response to Phillip West's article on Gower School birds and his sighting of the Little, or White-bellied, Cuckoo-shrike, there have been regular sightings of them in the Pullens Rd./Gower School area over

approximately the last two years.

* Huge flocks of Long-billed Corellas have been appearing over the town since the rain started, and a number have been hanging around the Post Office clock tower again. They are also starting to descend on newly planted crops.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING -

Photographs wanted

The Club is putting out an appeal for photographs of club outings, projects, campouts etc. for a visual record of the Club. It is intended that we should make up a photograph album which will not only be of historical interest to members, but could also be used to interest and inform enquirers when we are requested to set up a Field Naturalists' display, such as the one at Native '99 at Skydancers.

Any photographs or slides that you would be willing to give to the club would be most gratefully received, and when you are taking photographs of Club occasions please consider making a duplicate for the Club.

VFNCA Campout 15 - 19 Sept '99

SUMMARY- (booking forms are available from the secretary.) -

DATES- Wed 15, registration. 16-17, optional outings. 18-19, outings and meetings.

CATERING- Cut lunches, barbecue, and dinner on Sat. night.

ACCOMMODATION - bookings can be made with the Alfred Deakin visitor info. centre, 1800 039 043. It is suggested that we book ASAP.

EXCURSIONS - to a selected cross section of the area outside the tourist venues, two days being bussed, two drive-yourself. Guides provided. Bookings for the Friday and Saturday bus trips are essential.

➤ BOOKINGS - A \$25 registration fee before Aug 1 to -

Sunraysia Field Naturalists Club Inc,
PO Box 763 MILDURA Vic. 3502

Full payment (not indicated) due Sept 1. (Cost will depend on cost of buses etc.)

Final details should be available by July according to David Robinson of the Sunraysia club. You will then be able to choose your excursion preferences and complete your bookings. He has also indicated that they are planning to have a couple of night excursions.

Inquiries - David Robinson, Phone/Fax 03 5023 0598
dotdavid@vic.ozland.net.au

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, JUNE 1999
C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. June 11 **The Ecology of Box/Ironbark Forests.** Speaker is Annette Muir, who has been working with DNRE. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. June 12. **Unknown Miner's Grave and Kalimna North.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp. Leader is R. Mills.

Fri. July 9 **Coliban Water** Speaker is Greg Peters of North Central Management Authority. Talk will include slides. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. July 10 **Mopoke Gully, Yapeen.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm. Leader is M. Badminton.

Fri. Aug. 13 **The Overland Track Relived** An evening of slides, photos and narrative with the walkers. UCA hall, 8pm

Sun. Sept 5 **Fryerstown area** joint excursion with Ballarat FNC. Leader Norma Dickerson, GDT Association member. Details later.

Fri. Sept. 10. **Microscopy.**, Peter Sansom and Ern Perkins. UCA hall. 8pm

Sat. Sept 11 **Terrick Terrick.** All day excursion. Leave 27 Doveton St at 9.30 am. Take lunch, etc. Don't forget the binocs!

Wed. - Sun., Sept 15 - 19. **VFNCA Campout at Mildura.** Main program will be at the weekend; the extended program is for early arrivals. Preliminary information on p. 7

Fri. Oct. 8 **Birds and Words from History and Literature** Speaker is Peter Allan of Rochester. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat. Oct. 9 **Kamarooka Forest.** Peter Allen will lead to a good place for bird nests in the forest. All day outing. We will be combining with Echuca BOC, meeting at 10.30am. Watch for details at a later date.

Fri. Nov. 12 **African Parks** John Turnbull. UCA hall, 8pm.

Committee; M. Dredge (President) Ph 5470 6474, E. Perkins (V.P. and Grievance Officer), B. Maund (Sec.)Ph 5472 4354, M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), G. Broadway, J. Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, Z. Thomas.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30
Pensioner/student: Single \$18, Family \$24. Supporting : \$31

The Subscription now covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

Incorporation N° A3010